

BISHOP'S DIOCESAN COUNCIL

comprising

**The Bishop's Council and Standing Committee
The Executive of the Exeter Diocesan Board of Finance Ltd.
The Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee**

**Draft minutes of the meeting held on Tuesday 12th May 2026
at the Old Deanery, Exeter at 18.00**

Introductory worship

The Bishop of Exeter in the chair

Attendance: The Right Revd Dr Mike Harrison, the Right Revd James Grier, the Ven. Verena Breed, the Ven. Jane Bakker, the Ven. Douglas Dettmer, the Ven Andrew Beane, Mrs Laura Ford, Mr Richard Buzzacott, the Revd. Preb. Peter March, Dr. Lystra Hagley-Dickinson, the Revd. Tanya Hockley-Still, the Very Revd. Jonathan Greener, Mr. Bob Mills, the Revd. Preb. Mike Partridge, the Revd. Preb Samantha Stayte, the Revd. Deborah Leighton Plom, Dr. Jennie Golding, the Revd. Andrew Thomas, Mr. Graham Dunn, Mr. Stephen Macey, Mr. Bob Mills, Mr. Mike Jefferies, the Revd. Preb. Rosie Austin, Mrs. Clare Lillington, Mr. Nicholas Courtman, Mrs. Siân Walker-McAllister and the Revd. Canon Dr. Benjamin Williams

I. Apologies and Notices

Apologies were received from the Right Revd. Moira Astin, Mr. Giles Frampton and Mr. Nigel Price. The absence of Mr. Stephen Hancock, the Diocesan Secretary, was also noted.

- Notice was given of the resignation of Dr. Kerry Gilbert as Chair of the House of Laity. Dr Gilbert was thanked in her absence and wished well in her new employed role as Head of Formation. A casual election for the Chair of the House of Laity was underway and at the close of nominations (on 12th May) only one candidate had been duly nominated. Mr. Bob Mills was accordingly announced as the new Chair of the House of Laity and Lay Vice President of Diocesan Synod for the remainder of the triennium.
- Notice was also given of the Revd. Preb. Samantha Stayte having been appointed as Associate Diocesan Director of Ordinands and Vocations Development Officer from early July, stepping down as Dean of Women's Ministry and therefore in due course also as a nominee to the Council. Consideration was being given to a new approach to the role of Dean of Women's Ministry, including the appointment of 4 archdeacons associates.
- Notice was further given of the resignation of the Very Revd. Jonathan Greener, retiring as Dean of Exeter Cathedral in July, and for whom this would therefore also be his final meeting of the Council. Arrangements for farewell services on Sunday 5th July were shared, as was information about the appointment of an interim dean from 1st August.
- Mrs Clare Lillington from the Totnes Archdeaconry and Mr. Nicholas Courtman of the Plymouth Archdeaconry were both welcomed to their first meeting as elected members.
- Also welcomed to the meeting was Mrs Siân Walker-McAllister, as a Bishop's nominee. Furthermore, given her professional background, it was noted that Mrs. Walker-McAllister had also been appointed as interim lead safeguarding trustee for the DBF. Members were reminded that making such an appointment had been discussed at the

last meeting and it was noted that further consideration would be given to the wider circumstances under item 7.

- Notice was given that the first report to the Council from the Programme Board overseeing the Diocesan Investment Programme funding would come to the next meeting.
- In the absence of the Chair of the Diocesan Board of Finance, it was agreed that the Bishop of Exeter would remain in the chair throughout the meeting including for those items where the DBF Executive is the 'lead' body.

2. Declaration of any actual or potential conflict of interest arising from the agenda or accompanying papers

No declarations of actual or potential conflicts of interest were received.

3. To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 31st January 2026 **Paper BDC/16/26**

It was noted that in respect of the issue raised for confirmation outside of the meeting (relating to indemnity insurance for Directors, as set out on p.4 of the minutes), the relevant actions had been undertaken and assurances received. The situation would be reviewed annually.

It was also agreed to amend the minutes to reflect the decision taken at the meeting to vary the order of business from that set out in the original agenda (specifically that the item on the DBF risk register had been taken before the item on the funding of the Cranbrook church building, rather than vice versa) and further to note within the minutes that a verbatim account of a section of the discussion (relating to the Diocesan Investment Programme funding) had been transcribed and distributed to members.

4. To consider the 2027 Budget Strategy **Paper BDC/17/26**

Mr. Neil Williams, the Diocesan Director of Finance, reminded members of the process by which the annual diocesan budget was formulated and ultimately approved by the Diocesan Synod at its October meeting. As usual the Budget Strategy Group had been undertaking preliminary work through the early part of the year and this included responding, as far as possible, to fast-developing events that would impact the macro-economic outlook. He noted that at this stage, the aim was to air views and see where there were broad areas of agreement, as well as to provide an opportunity for alternative views to be considered. He also noted that the base scenario that was under consideration involved a £600k deficit for 2027 (to be covered by a contribution from unrestricted reserves) but that that already assumed £1.8m of internally-vired support from the realisation of assets. The underlying structural deficit was therefore in the region of £2.4m.

Mr. Ian King, the Diocesan Director of Finance designate, then commented on the sensitivity analysis work that had been undertaken in preparing the strategy. In particular, it looked in detail at the impact of changing key income assumptions, the most important of which were the projected number of participants (in turn derived from trend analysis and the impact of additional grant investment in activities to encourage growth) and the related field of contributions made to the Common Fund. He noted that making relatively small changes to these key assumptions quickly made a substantial difference (positively or negatively) to the projected deficit. This process would be cumulative over time, so early monitoring of growth outputs and outcomes arising from the injection of grant funding would be of particular importance. Finally, he noted that many dioceses faced challenging situations of similar complexity; if growth wasn't forthcoming the only sustainable ways forward would be major

structural change or a fundamental alteration to the financial relationship between dioceses and the national church.

In discussion, the new and more extensive sensitivity analysis in the strategy was welcomed. Clarification was sought as to whether the projected increase in participants related simply to the number of new participants in the life of the Church or the net increase in participants (ie having taken account of participants who had left) who would meet the qualification for inclusion in the calculation of the Common Fund. Confirmation was provided that the figure related to the latter, on an assumed base of no increase and no decline in the underlying figure. It was noted that although the potential for inward migration (particularly within older age cohorts) had been considered as a relevant factor, it had not been included in the participation modelling. Concerns were expressed that although the inflation assumption would have looked reasonable at the point at which it was originally made, current political and economic instability meant that it may have to be increased at a later point in the budget setting process, potentially quite significantly. This was noted, although it was also observed that the most influential factors related to stipend and salary inflation, and these would be known quantities at a relatively early stage. The impact of higher levels of inflation on the capacity of donors to give was more of an unknown consideration.

Members were then given the opportunity to consider the questions set out in the Executive Summary in small groups and to confirm the key budget assumptions that would be used to underpin the preparation of the 2027 budget. These assumptions, along with a summary of Council members' inputs, would then be further tested with Diocesan Synod, at its meeting on 6 June 2026.

After discussion members then provided written feedback and brief comments in plenary.

5. To agree terms of reference for the Common Fund Review **Paper BDC/18/26**

Mr Neil Williams, the Diocesan Director of Finance, introduced the proposed terms of reference for the Common Fund review to take place in 2026 and 2027, with a view to implementing any changes arising to the Common Fund scheme of assessment from 2028. He noted that the terms relating to the matters to be regarded as 'in scope' were deliberately worded in an open and non-exhaustive fashion in order to avoid the exclusion of new issues and considerations that might emerge during the course of the review. It was intended that the review would take into account as much evidence as reasonably possible from outside of the Diocese as well as to engage directly with every deanery synod, which would require deanery synods to make time available for consultation at the appropriate juncture.

In discussion it was noted that the timetable for the review looked challenging, especially considering the amount of work and the number of stages involved. It was agreed that the timetable would itself need to be kept under review such that it remained workable for all of the consultation bodies involved, as well as in relation to annual budget setting processes. It was also noted that the implementation of any outcomes might need to be phased, perhaps depending on the degree of change involved, in order that parishes might have sufficient time to prepare for the outcomes of a new assessment calculation.

The terms of reference were accordingly agreed by general assent.

6. To give consideration to a Diocesan Vacancies and Appointments Policy **Paper BDC/19/26**

Mr Neil Williams, the Diocesan Director of Finance, introduced the new Diocesan Vacancies and Appointments Policy, and noted that the policy related to the approach of the Diocesan Bishop

to parish clergy vacancies and appointments. As these responsibilities lay legally with the Bishop (consulting as necessary with the Diocesan Mission and Pastoral Committee and other bodies), the policy was being brought forward for information and discussion. It replaced the previous 'Common Fund and Vacancies Policy' and sought to set decisions about vacancies and appointments in their full legal context; the aspects of the former policy that related to the Common Fund had been updated and included as an appendix to the new policy.

In discussion, support was expressed for the increased clarity of the policy in relation to the legislative provisions from which it proceeded. It was noted that although section 4.2 of the policy might be felt to be challenging, this reflected the legal position as set out in the relevant Measure. Concerns were nevertheless expressed about some of the commentary in the appendix about the nature of the relationship between the decision to seek to make an appointment in a parish and the current and historical payment of Common Fund contributions by that parish. It was reiterated that the review process outlined in the appendix was at the request of the Bishop and was one factor to be taken into account, among others, by the Bishop when making a decision whether to appoint. It was noted that there was a risk that the operation of the previous policy had led to a perception of a too-direct relationship between the payment of Common Fund and permission to appoint to a parochial post (and it was suggested that this had been evidenced in the minutes of the Assets Group, cf. Paper BDC/23/26). Even so, members of the Assets Group were at pains to point out that the purpose of the previous policy, and the way in which it was operated, was to seek to open up a conversation with the parish(es) involved with a view to understanding the totality of the local circumstances and preparing a plan that would enable a recruitment and appointment process to be undertaken.

It was suggested in relation to the new Vacancies and Appointments Policy, some further consideration might be given to aspects of the language of the appendix in order more clearly to express the range of support of and engagement with parishes that would be undertaken within the context of the review with the intended outcome of reaching a position of being able to make a positive recommendation to the Diocesan Bishop.

7. To give further consideration to trustee safeguarding reporting procedures

The Right Revd. Dr. Mike Harrison, Bishop of Exeter, reminded members about their discussions at previous meetings and noted that conversations were continuing nationally between the Church of England and the Charity Commission. The conversations were wide-ranging and complex (for example because of the Church's federated nature, the legal status of clergy office holders and the different understandings and definitions of 'safeguarding'); in the meantime the Charity Commission were continuing to attend closely to procedure and practice within individual Diocesan Boards of Finance, particularly with regard to the discharging of trustee responsibilities for safeguarding and Serious Incident Reporting. He further noted that for this and other reasons he had decided to nominate to the Council a person with appropriate professional background and expertise to transact the role of interim lead safeguarding trustee.

Mr. Costa Nassaris, the Diocesan Safeguarding Officer, noted that developments were happening at speed in a number of different areas of work. The Charity Commission was looking in detail at whether trustees (of Diocesan Boards of Finance and also of PCCs) were sufficiently informed about the formal assessment and reporting of casework that lay within their field of responsibility. This would include not only being appropriately informed about cases where the decision had been made to submit a Serious Incident Report (SIR) to the Charity Commission but also marginal cases where a decision had been taken that an SIR was not required. He also noted that the number of case referrals had risen in the last year from around 300 to over 500. The vast majority of these were reports received within the

mechanisms operated by the Church (whether directly to the Diocesan Safeguarding Team or in a local parish context) but were nothing directly to do with the Church itself, its operations or the people involved in running it. Only 88 related to church officers of any sort (clergy and lay, including volunteers) and of the overall total 56 had required formal risk assessments. Five SIRs had been submitted to the Charity Commission. The appointment of a lead trustee for safeguarding meant that the detail of the most serious cases (both those resulting in SIRs and where that had been an active consideration before a decision had been taken not to do so) could be appropriately shared at trustee level and the reporting process could be actively monitored and decisions reviewed. With the Charity Commission pushing to broaden the definition of safeguarding that was applied across the Church of England, there was a clear risk that the number of case referrals would continue to rise, creating further capacity issues within the Safeguarding Team.

Mrs. Siân Walker-McAllister then introduced herself and set out her professional background and experience. She noted that as a Registered Social Worker she was in a position to hold case information in confidence and within the parameters of that professional capacity and discipline. Her experience as a Local Authority Director of Social Services, the Chair of various safeguarding boards and as a consultant on statutory inspection processes would provide the DBF with both strategic safeguarding expertise at trustee level as well as an 'external' perspective that would provide both constructive challenge and affirmation of good practice. Furthermore, she would also bring an 'internal' view, grounded in a local church context, as a parish safeguarding representative and safeguarding trainer. She noted that the detail of how the lead safeguarding trustee role would work in practice, including the scrutiny of decision-making, was still being worked on and that further information would be brought to the next meeting.

Mr. Nassaris then set out a number of other areas of work where significant progress was in hand. These included the current national consultation on safeguarding structures, the development of a national safeguarding complaints policy, the potential for a formal national apology to be made by the Church of England relating to historical cases of forced adoption (and the implications of this for individual dioceses) and the potential for formal regional co-operation between dioceses in the delivery of safeguarding services.

In discussion it was noted that the DBF has responded to any and all communications sent to it by the Charity Commission; for the time being the primary connection to the latest developments was therefore through the national conversation. In respect of the prospective need to be able to triage an increasing volume of incoming cases consistently and appropriately, it was noted that the National Safeguarding Team were working on a threshold tool which should enable the further development and roll out of good practice. In reality, a triaging process was already in hand, with decisions being taken on the basis of the existing definitions and with an emphasis on where the particular circumstances meant the case could be most effectively dealt with. It was noted that the relatively tight statutory definition of a 'vulnerable adult' meant that more cases involving complaints from adults would fit better within processes that had a 'human resources' focus (for example, in relation to bullying and harassment). Finally, it was noted that the efforts to build capacity and encourage collegiality amongst Parish Safeguarding Representatives were very much appreciated; recognition and training were often experienced as mutually supportive by volunteers who had taken on local safeguarding responsibilities.

8. To receive information relating to quinquennial elections to the General Synod, to give consideration to the holding of hustings and to make arrangements for appeals panels

Dr. Ed Moffatt, the Head of Governance and Diocesan Electoral Registration Officer, spoke to the timetable for the elections to the General Synod between July and October 2026 and noted the associated arrangements to be made, particularly where these differed from previous elections.

In the absence of any discussion, he then noted the appeals processes laid out in the election rules and on behalf of the Presiding Officer sought the consent of the Bishop's Council to the process laid out in the paper. This was agreed by general assent.

Members were then asked to give consideration to the question of whether hustings should be held in relation to the clergy and lay elections. It was noted that under the electoral guidance, hustings were not a formal part of the elections process and that it was for the Presiding Officer, having consulted with the Bishop's Council, to make the decision and make the associated arrangements.

In discussion, it was noted that consideration should be given to the accessibility needs of participants within the process. Hustings had previously been poorly attended and concerns were expressed, from different perspectives, about whether both in-person and on-line hustings, albeit in different ways, were fair and accessible to all involved. It was noted that different models of moderation were possible and that consideration should also be given to the nature of the role to which candidates were seeking election (in that the General Synod was primarily a body that met in person, which meant that anyone elected to it would need to be able to operate in that environment). It was also noted that alternative approaches could also be considered (such as recorded question and answer sessions for each candidate, or written questions and answers) and might enable more candidates and electors to participate.

Two informal polls of members' views were then conducted. Members indicated that their preference was for some form of interaction between candidates and the electorate to be held, rather than for none. In respect of the preferred form of interaction, a small majority of members indicated a preference for live hustings to be held on-line. Each of the other options (physical hustings in one or more locations around the diocese and on-line engagement other than in a live event eg. via a digital whiteboard for questions and answers) were each supported by a minority of members.

9. To review the Diocese's Deanery Synod Rules and to agree recommendations

Paper BDC/21/26

Dr. Ed Moffatt, the Head of Governance, described the process by which the Diocese's Deanery Synod Rules are reviewed triennially, with decisions on amendments to the Rules to be taken by the Diocesan Synod. He noted that the Rules were derived from the Church Representation Rules, which were themselves frequently updated by the General Synod. They also needed to relate well to other relevant rules and regulations, such as those governing the processes for holding elections to the General Synod, which were of particular relevance on this occasion.

In the light of the fact that 2026 would see a once in 15 years' conjunction between elections to deanery synods and elections to the General Synod, one substantive amendment to the Deanery Synod Rules was therefore proposed for consideration. This would make explicit provision to deal with a scenario whereby a deanery synod secretary would be required to act under one set of election rules at precisely the point when there could be a vacancy in the role under the other.

In the absence of any discussion the recommendation was agreed for transmission to the Diocesan Synod for approval.

10. To agree items for inclusion of the agenda of the next meeting of the Diocesan Synod

Dr Ed Moffatt, the Head of Governance, noted that owing to the slightly awkward timing of the meeting of the Synod on Saturday 6th June, the Notice of Business for the meeting had already been circulated to members, ahead of the formal agreement of the agenda by Bishop's Council. However, the Bishop's Council could still make changes to the business listed in the Notice of Business and members of Synod had been advised of this possibility.

The following items of business were agreed:

- Presidential Address
- Promulgation of Amending Canon 44
- Discussion of the Diocesan Budget Strategy for 2027
- Approval of amendments to the Deanery Synod Rules
- Consideration of a Diocesan Prayer Strategy

Deemed Items

11. To receive reports from the Archidiaconal Mission and Pastoral Committees

Paper BDC/22/26

12. To receive a report from the Assets Group

Paper BDC/23/26

13. To receive a report from the DBF Standing Committee

Paper BDC/24/26

14. To receive the Common Fund out-turn for 2025 and an update for 2026

Paper BDC/25/26